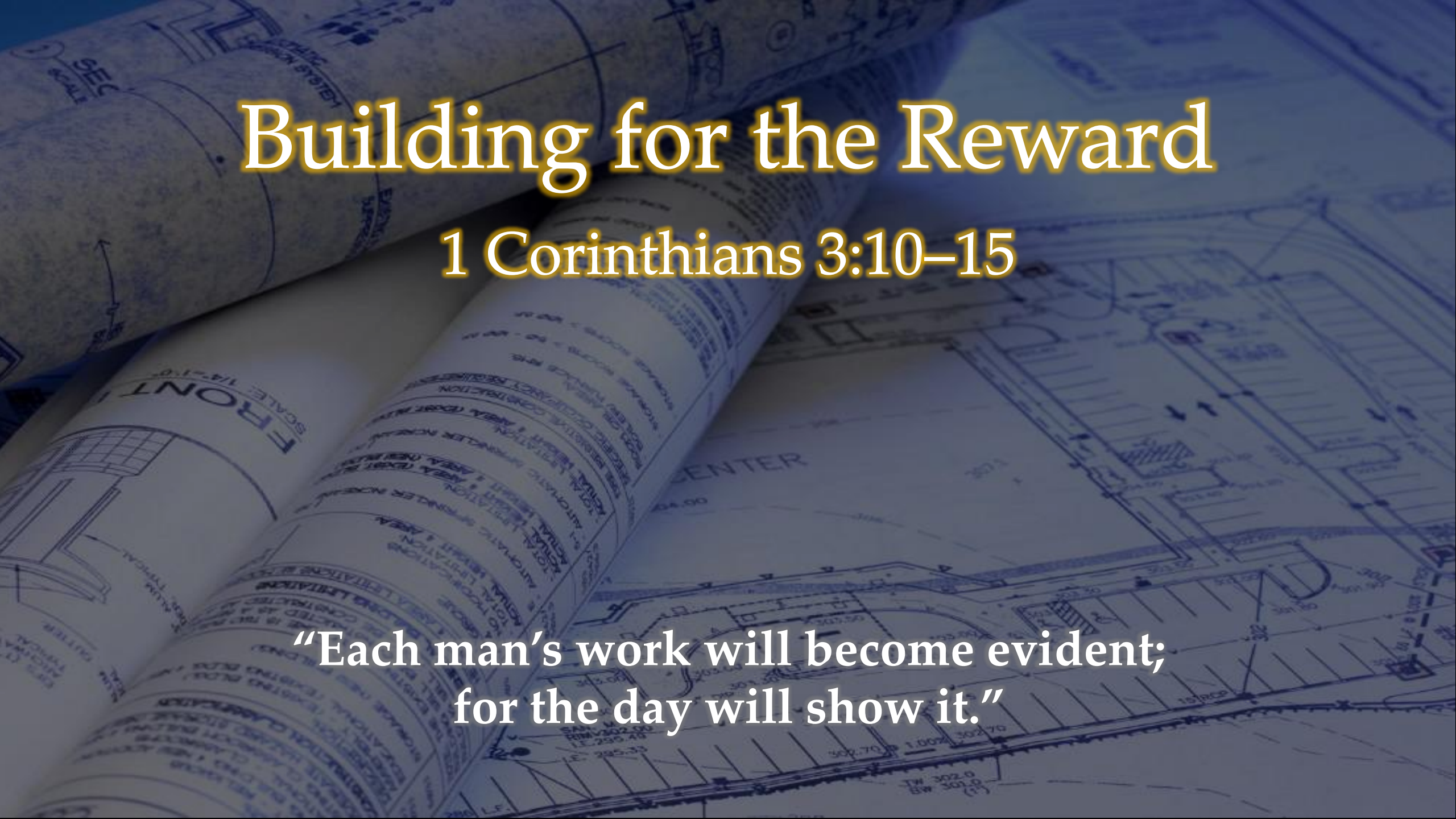




Building for the Reward

1 Corinthians 3:10–15

“Each man’s work will become evident;
for the day will show it.”

Why are we reluctant to speak of future rewards?

1. A faulty understanding of God.

- God's goodness and grace toward me were exhausted when He saved me.
- I am still a wretched sinner, utterly incapable of doing anything that truly pleases God.
- God is angry at me for all that I do and only relents from punishing me because of the intercession of Christ.

Why are we reluctant to speak of future rewards? (cont'd)

2. A faulty understanding of salvation.

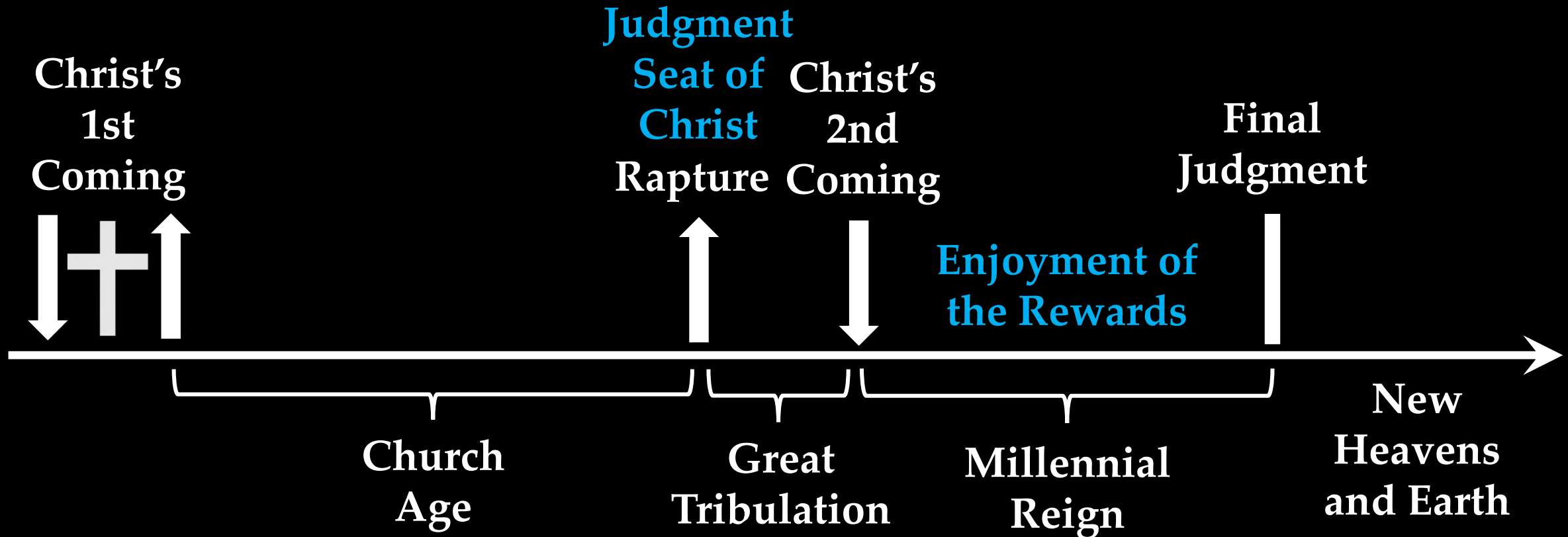
- Any concept of “merit” or “reward” immediately leads to the heresy of works-based salvation.
- The doctrine of justification—which makes us all equal at the cross—makes us all equal at the judgment seat of Christ.
- Even if there is a promise of rewards, we will cast them all back before Christ’s throne anyway.
- Christ is our reward; to say anything more is to add to Christ.

Why are we reluctant to speak of future rewards? (cont'd)

3. A faulty understanding of the future.

- The judgment seat of Christ is the same event as the final judgment, when believers will be awarded with eternal life and unbelievers condemned to eternal punishment.
- All Christians enjoy a no-condemnation status; they will never appear before a “judgment seat” to have their works evaluated.
- Rewards based upon good works implies distinctions, and there can be no distinctions for God’s people in the future state of glory.

- **Note:** Only *premillennialism* allows for a doctrine of reward connected to the judgment seat of Christ.
- **“Premillennialism”:** Christ’s second coming occurs immediately **before** (“pre-”) His millennial rule.



“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

—1 Corinthians 3:10–15

- Paul's instructions about gospel ministry in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 provide three standards for our ministry today.

I. Build on the Right Foundation (vv. 10–11)

II. Build with the Right Materials (vv. 12–13)

III. Build for the Right Result (vv. 14–15)

Context



- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his 3-year ministry in Ephesus, on his 3rd missionary journey (AD 55):
 - 1) To confront a church divided in its fellowship, compromising with its culture, and chaotic in its worship.
 - 2) To answer questions the church had asked of Paul.

- First Corinthians 3:10–15 falls within the first major section of Paul's letter, wherein he rebukes the Corinthian disunity (1:10–4:21).



- **3:1–4** – The sinful divisiveness of the Corinthian believers.
- **3:5–9** – The humble equality of God's ministers.
- **3:10–15** – The individual responsibility of each minister.

I. Build on the Right Foundation (vv. 10–11)

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

- To describe the work of gospel ministry, Paul uses the analogy of *building*—an analogy that was easily understood by the Corinthians.
- Corinth had been destroyed the Romans in 146 BC, but in 44 BC Julius Caesar rebuilt the city into a significant Roman colony.



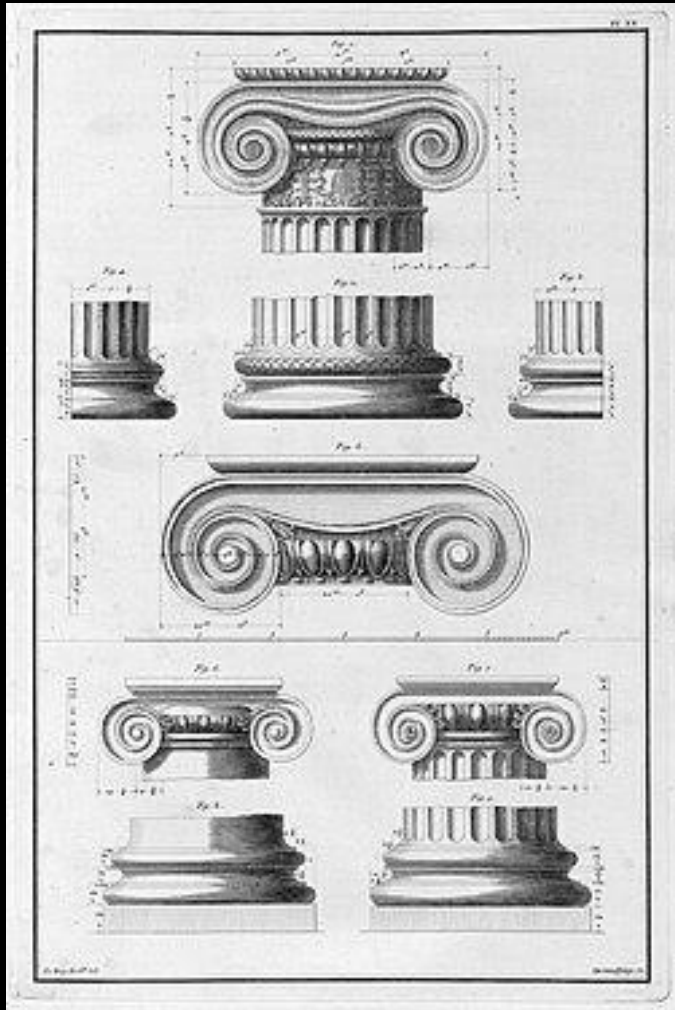
- By Paul's day, Corinth was one of the largest cities in the empire, with a population of over 200,000 people.
- It was one of the most vibrant commercial cities of the empire as well.
- Its architecture represented a blend of classical Greek temples with updated Roman civic planning.
- It was known for its massive agora (marketplace), wide marble streets, ornate city buildings, and impressive water fountains.

A. The Foundation Identified (v. 10a)

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it.”

- **“The grace of God . . . given to me”** – not a reference to *salvation* but to *gifting* (Eph 4:7); Paul was called to be *an apostle* (1 Cor 1:1).
- **“A wise master builder”** – “a skillful architect [ἀρχιτέκτων]” — the chief role of an apostle; the phrase describes not only the function of a *designer/architect*, but also of a *foreman*.
- **“I laid a foundation”** – as an apostle, Paul’s responsibility was to *draw the blueprints* for gospel ministry and *establish the trajectory*; he considered this already *accomplished*.

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and **another is building on it.**”



- “Another is building on it” – others must *continue* the project of gospel ministry; but they neither alter the blueprints nor draw up different ones.

*It is not our duty to redesign gospel ministry according to our preferences.
It is our duty to continue what has been established by the apostles.*

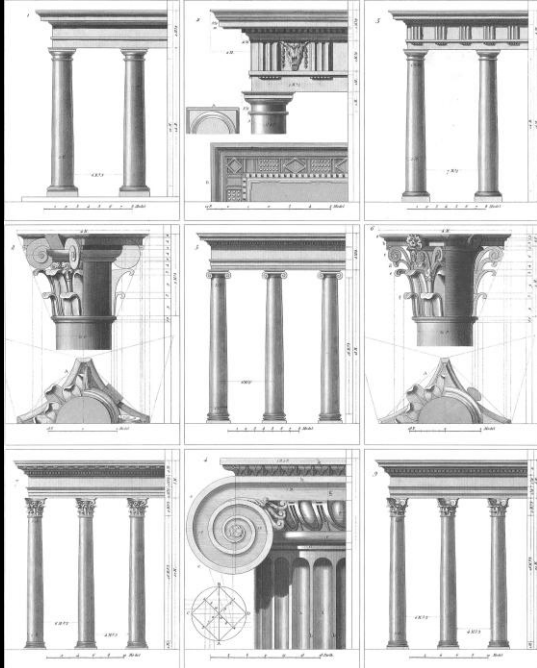
B. The Work Expected (vv. 10b–11)

“But **each man** **must be careful how** he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ.**”

- “Each man” – “each without exception”; the primary reference is to evangelists and pastors (see v. 6), but the application is for all involved in the ministry of the gospel.
- “Must be careful how” – “to be especially observant, to give careful attention to”; requires a continuous concern for *quality*.
- “Which is Jesus Christ” – ministry efforts cannot have any other basis for existence than to advance Jesus Christ.

II. Build with the Right Materials (vv. 12–13)

“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”



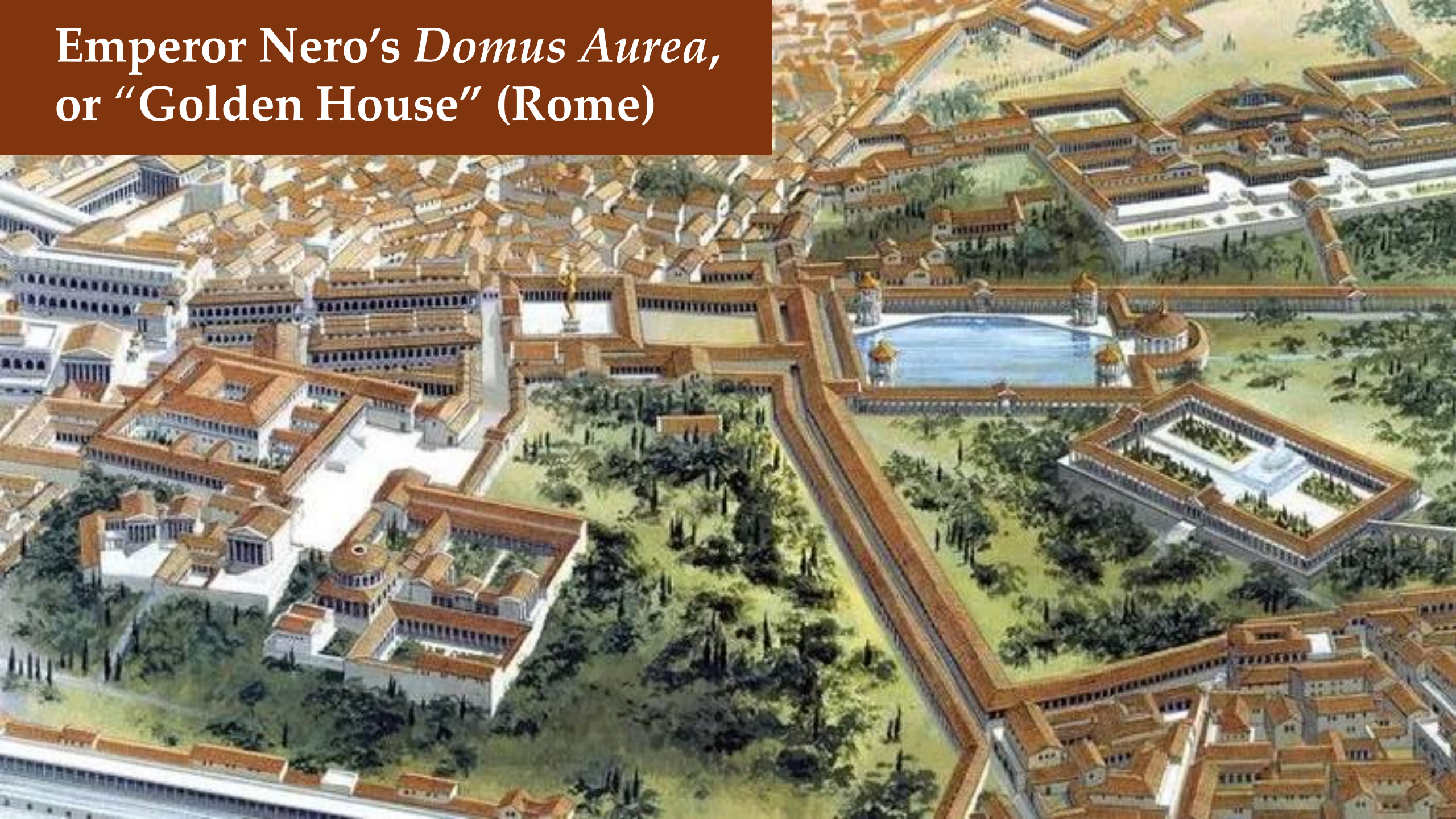
- Paul continues the analogy by describing two categories of *building materials*—details very well-recognized by the readers.
- Even though the right foundation may be identified, the quality of the materials used to build upon it *matter greatly*.

A. The Options Available (vv. 12–13a)

“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident.”

- “Gold, silver, precious stones” – materials that are rare, costly, honorable, beautiful, and permanent; they do not decay or lose their value; to build with them means to spare no expense.

Emperor Nero's *Domus Aurea*, or "Golden House" (Rome)



A. The Options Available (vv. 12–13a)

“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, **wood, hay, straw**, each man’s work **will become evident.**”

- “**Gold, silver, precious stones**” – materials that are rare, costly, honorable, beautiful, and permanent; they do not decay or lose their value; to build with them means to spare no expense.
- “**Wood, hay, straw**” – materials that are easy to obtain, cheap, unattractive; and temporary; they deteriorate and lose their value; they easily burn; to build with them means to invest minimally.
- “**Will become evident**” – the true quality of one’s ministry is not knowable now, but it will be completely known eventually.

Gold, silver, precious stones

- Proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified (2:2).
- Serving in weakness and trembling (2:3).
- Ministering in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power (2:4).
- Exalting the power of God (2:5).

Wood, hay, straw

- Proclaiming the world's wisdom (2:1, 5).
- Serving according to the world's ways (2:1, 4).
- Ministering in the strength of the flesh (2:4).
- Exalting the power of man (2:5).

B. The Inspection Guaranteed (v. 13b)

“for **the day** will show it because it is *to be* **revealed with fire**, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. ”

- “The day” – not just *a* day, but a *specific* day — *the* day; points to a specific event during which each believer’s building materials will be assessed.
 - Not the “Day of the Lord” but the “Day of Christ” (1 Cor 6:7; Phil 1:6, 9–10; 2:15–16).
 - The same as the “judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:9–10).
- “Revealed with fire” – not hellfire or purgatory, but a divine assessment that removes the veneer to show the real quality.

III. Build for the Right Result (vv. 14–15)

“If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

- Paul furthers the analogy by describing two outcomes of the process of building: *receiving commendation* or *suffering loss*.
- The inspector’s assessment will either reveal *craftsmanship, dedication, and sacrifice*, or it will reveal *defects, laziness, and compromise*.
- One thing is sure: *recompense*.



A. The Reward Guaranteed (v. 14)

‘If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.’

- “If . . . [it] remains” – the *condition*; if—at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10)—the labor is revealed to be of good quality.
- “He will receive a reward” – the *guarantee*: “remuneration for work done”; individually assessed; not a reference to salvation.
 - **1 Corinthians 9:24b** – “Run in such a way that you might win.”
 - **2 Timothy 2:6** – “The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.”

“The basis of judgment will be solely upon the ground of the works performed after the individual has been brought to God. All those works that have been accomplished through the motivation of the constraining love of the Christ of God and with the purpose of the glory of God, will receive reward.”

—Charles Feinberg

B. The Loss Forewarned (v. 15)

“If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

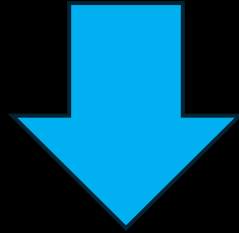
- **“If . . . [it] is burned up”** – the condition; if—at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10)—the work is revealed to be unsatisfactory.
- **“He will suffer loss”** – the guarantee: the experience of the loss of commendation and opportunity; individually assessed.
- **“But he himself will be saved”** – Paul makes it clear that this “loss” is not related to *salvation*; he addresses those who are already saved.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

—2 Corinthians 5:10

“Resolved: that I will live so as I shall wish I had done
when I come to die.”

—Jonathan Edwards, Resolution #17



“Resolved: that I will live so as I shall wish I had done
when I come to that Day.”

Considerations for Self-Examination

- 1) Recognize your role; you are not an architect but a laborer.
- 2) The quality of your ministry matters. What counts is not being busy, but your means, methods, and motivations.
- 3) The judgment seat of Christ is inevitable. The quality of your individual service will be fully revealed.
- 4) God is a rewarder of service done rightly.
- 5) Focus on your own responsibilities; it is not your duty to render this “fire” (1 Cor 4:5; Gal 6:4).

